

You Have to Wake Up by PaperBodies

Series: [Harringrove April Challenge \[3\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

There's something nagging at the back of Billy's mind. Something happened. Something bad, something he should probably remember, but it doesn't matter. Not now. Not when he's here, with Steve, and they're happy. Nothing can touch him here. He sighs contentedly, leans in a little closer, and points to another part of the sky.

"What about that one?"

1. Day 6-7: Stargazing, daisy chain

“What about that one?” Billy pushes his luck as far as he reasonably can, leaning in so far that his head is almost touching Steve’s as he points up. If Steve says anything about it, he’ll just say he was trying to make sure Steve saw which constellation he was pointing at.

“Ummmm...” Steve says, “that’s the Sea Turtle constellation.”

“Oh yeah?” Billy asks, trying to suppress a laugh. Steve nods solemnly and reaches out, indicating that he would like Billy to pass back the joint they’re sharing. Billy does, and their fingers touch for longer than is strictly necessary.

They’re stretched out on the hood of the Camaro, shoulders propped up on the windshield. Billy’s pretty sure that Steve couldn’t name a single actual constellation if his life depended on it, but he likes the ones he makes up better anyway.

“What about that one?” Billy points at a different part of the sky. He’s pretty sure he’s pointing at the Bull. Steve holds the smoke in his lungs for a beat before he exhales.

“That one’s the Dancer,” he says confidently.

“Is it?” Billy asks.

“Yeah, he’s got his arms up and everything.” Steve throws his arms up to demonstrate, and Billy can’t suppress his laughter anymore. It’s higher and dorkier than the laugh he usually uses, but he’s too baked to care. Steve giggles along with him, and Billy can’t remember the last time he was this happy. Steve holds out the last of the joint, and Billy takes it and finishes it. He flicks it out into the darkness over the quarry and turns his head to look back at Steve. Steve is staring up at the sky, small smile on his face and his eyes wide and full of wonder. When Billy sets his hand back down between them, his pinky is touching Steve’s. Steve is warm against him and when he turns to look at Billy, Billy can’t help himself. He leans in and presses his lips to Steve’s. He’s half expecting Steve to recoil, but he doesn’t. He leans in and turns his head for a better angle, and something warm and

light expands in Billy's chest. When Billy finally pulls back, Steve smiles at him.

There's something nagging at the back of Billy's mind. Something happened. Something bad, something he should probably remember, but it doesn't matter. Not now. Not when he's here, with Steve, and they're happy. Nothing can touch him here. He sighs contentedly, leans in a little closer, and points to another part of the sky.

"What about that one?"

"What about that one?" Billy pushes his luck as far as he reasonably can, leaning in so far that his head is almost touching Steve's as he points up. If Steve says anything about it, he'll just say he was trying to make sure Steve saw which constellation he was pointing at.

"Ummmm..." Steve says, "that's the Sea Turtle constellation."

"Oh yeah?" Billy asks, trying to suppress a laugh. Steve nods solemnly and reaches out, indicating that he would like Billy to pass back the joint they're sharing. Billy does, and their fingers touch briefly. Billy pulls back and then stares at his hand, not sure what made him pull away. He glances over at Steve, but Steve doesn't seem to have noticed anything out of the ordinary.

They're stretched out on the hood of the Camaro, shoulders propped up on the windshield. Billy's pretty sure that Steve couldn't name a single actual constellation if his life depended on it, but he likes the ones he makes up better anyway. Billy shakes his head to clear the vague sense of apprehension and tries to relax.

"What about that one?" He points at a different part of the sky. He's pretty sure he's pointing at the Bull. Steve holds the smoke in his lungs for a beat before he exhales.

"That one's the Dancer," he says confidently.

"Is it?" Billy asks.

"Yeah, he's got his arms up and everything." Steve throws his arms

up to demonstrate, and Billy can't suppress his laughter anymore. It's higher and dorkier than the laugh he usually uses, but he's too baked to care. Steve giggles along with him, and Billy tries to ignore the growing fear in the pit of his stomach. After all, he's here with Steve. There's nothing to be afraid of. Steve holds out the last of the joint, and Billy takes it and finishes it. He flicks it out into the darkness over the quarry and turns his head to look back at Steve. Steve is staring up at the sky, small smile on his face and his eyes wide and full of wonder. When Billy sets his hand back down between them, his pinky is touching Steve's. Billy flinches away, the heat of Steve's hand like a burn against his skin. Steve turns to look at him, and all Billy can do is stare. He can't imagine getting any closer to that heat. The thought sets off alarm bells in some distant part of his mind, but his thoughts scatter every time Billy tries to think about why. Steve smiles at him, and Billy smiles back uneasily.

There's something nagging at the back of Billy's mind. Something happened. Something bad, something he should probably remember, but it shouldn't matter. Not now. Not when he's here, with Steve. Nothing has ever been able to touch him here. He sighs and tries to recapture the sense of contentment he felt earlier. He moves a little further away from Steve, and points to another part of the sky.

"What about that one?"

"What about that one?" Billy pushes his luck as far as he reasonably can, leaning in so far that his head is almost touching Steve's as he points up. He stops before they actually touch because Steve is radiating heat, and Billy feels like he might burn if he gets too close.

"Ummmm..." Steve says, "that's the Sea Turtle constellation."

"Oh yeah?" Billy asks, trying to suppress a laugh. Steve nods solemnly and reaches out, indicating that he would like Billy to pass back the joint they're sharing. Billy does, and their fingers touch. Billy recoils from Steve's heat, and the joint drops onto the hood of the Camaro between them. Billy curses and reaches for it, and then pauses.

“No,” he says aloud.

“What?” Steve asks him, brow creased with confusion. Billy sits up from where he’s stretched out on the hood of the Camaro. He looks around. They’re parked at the top of the quarry, wide sky stretched out above them, forest all around them. Everything is quiet and still.

“This is wrong,” Billy says. Steve sits up next to him.

“What’s wrong?” Steve looks concerned now. He reaches out to touch Billy’s arm, and Billy slides off the hood of the car in his eagerness to avoid the touch. That’s *wrong*. He wants Steve to touch him, always. Doesn’t he? He takes a few steps away from the car, and notices that the world seems to *fade* around the edges the further he gets from the Camaro. He turns back to ask if Steve is seeing this, but Steve is gone. It’s just Billy, standing by himself at the top of the quarry. The world is entirely too still around him, as though time has stopped.

“What the fuck,” he breathes.

“*Finally*,” a small, familiar voice says behind him, but when he turns around, there’s no one there. He’s all alone.

It would be inaccurate to say that Billy wakes up; he’s far from conscious enough for that. But he does briefly become aware of the heavy, pervasive scent of decay, and of a hard, cold surface against his side. He groans, once, and then everything goes black.

“Nope,” Billy says, and slides off the hood of the Camaro. The stars are bright and beautiful above them, but Billy doesn’t have time for this. Something is *wrong*.

“Billy?” Steve asks behind him, and he sounds concerned. When Billy turns around to respond he sees Steve dissolve into smoke, and he’s alone again. He’s probably supposed to be horrified, but Billy is furious instead. He may not have any idea what’s going on, but he’s smart enough to know that *that’s not actually Steve*, which means Steve is somewhere else, which means Billy is getting the fuck out of

here and going there. He waves both middle fingers in the general direction of the Camaro in the hopes that whoever is fucking with him will get the message, and then he sets off into the woods.

The woods are creepy, silent and entirely too still. He walks until he spots a glimmer of light up ahead. He debates avoiding it in case it's a trap, but he'd actually enjoy the opportunity to punch something right about now. He heads directly for it.

When he gets there, it doesn't look like a trap. It's a meadow full of flowers, bathed in bright spring sunlight. Which is weird, because it's still nighttime everywhere else. He glances up and verifies that the stars are indeed still out. Then he takes a deep breath and steps into the clearing. As soon as he does, a familiar figure appears in the center of the meadow. He walks over and sits down across from her.

"Hello Billy," she says. She looks up and smiles, but doesn't stop what she's doing, twisting daisies into a chain in her lap.

"El, right," he says, a little awkwardly. She nods. "What the f—" he starts, and then catches himself. She's a little girl. "What the hell is going on?" He tries to keep his voice mostly calm. She makes a face and pauses for a long time.

"You're...lost," she finally settles on. Billy just looks at her.

"But you're here talking to me right now," he points out. She nods.

"I can find you in here," she says, touching his forehead with one gentle finger. "But I can't tell where you actually are unless you wake up." He frowns. There's something wrong with that, but he can't remember what it is.

"I don't think I can," he says slowly. It feels right, even if he isn't sure why. Her eyes go a little hard.

"You can," she says firmly, leaving no room for argument, "but it is going to be hard. It does not want you to. It knows we are looking." He opens his mouth to ask what the hell she means, but she shakes her head. "Later," she says. "No time." She finishes the daisy chain and twists it into a circle, which she leans forward and places on top

of his curls. He raises his eyebrows at her. "Don't take it off," she warns, "for any reason." He nods, but she doesn't seem satisfied. "For *any* reason," she repeats. "Do you understand?" He nods, but she glares at him.

"Keep the flower crown on, got it." She nods once, but looks concerned.

"You are safe here. Once you leave, you will be less safe. You will have to be careful. Don't..." she seems to struggle with what to say. "Don't forget who you are," she finally says, and then she stands up. He stands as well. "Good luck," she says with a smile. "You can do this." And then she turns and walks out of the clearing. Billy stares after her for a long moment, and then reaches up to adjust the flower crown she gave him.

"Well," he mutters to himself, "here goes." He looks around the clearing, chooses a direction, and starts walking.

2. Day 8: Rebirth

Summary for the Chapter:

Billy remembers now that the voice lived in his head for only a few days, but that was plenty of time for it to dig through his memories and find the most painful moments. His deepest fears. He worries, for the first time, about what's coming next. About how much worse it's going to get. Still, he can't be here anymore. He turns and stumbles blindly down the stairs and out the front door. He walks toward the ocean, hoping it might bring at least a fraction of the solace it used to. Instead, the voice follows him. "The people who were supposed to love you the most couldn't do it. Why do you think that is, Billy?"

The world fades out the closer he gets to the edge of it, until he's standing in a strange grey fog. He takes another step forward, and he's suddenly back in his room in Neil's house, back pushed up against the door, Neil's hand fisted in his shirt. Neil is hissing something at him, but he can't hear it over a familiar whisper. It isn't inside his head anymore—he can tell that for sure. It's...distant somehow, but it's still there, cold and hollow. At the sound of it, he remembers that he had hoped to never hear it again. He doesn't remember all the reasons why, but he remembers feeling trapped inside his own mind. He shudders despite himself.

This is who you were, the voice whispers to him, fear and helplessness and humiliation. Billy sets his jaw at that. *I made you better.* He feels himself shove Neil away, his body seemingly acting on its own. *Stronger.* He shoves Neil again. *I protected you when no one else would.* Now he's standing over Neil, fists clenched at his sides. He can feel the excitement thrumming in his veins, the desire to step forward and pay Neil back for everything. And he wants to, *god*, he wants to. But something feels wrong about it, about his eagerness. It doesn't all feel like *his*. With an enormous burst of effort, he takes one step back. He's shaking with it.

"Fuck this," Billy spits, and he doesn't know if he's talking to Neil or

the voice or both. He turns to walk out of the room he hates in a house he hates. As he leaves, he hears a snarl that seems to come from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. He smiles a little to himself.

He walks until the world fades to grey again, clenching and unclenching his fists.

"I can do this," he mutters to himself, and if that's as bad as it gets, he absolutely can. He's been pushing back against the person Neil wanted him to be for a long time. He can push back against the fucking voice too. He takes a step forward and immediately realizes that that isn't as bad as it's going to get.

He's in the driver's seat of the Camaro, parked outside the middle school. Max's wrist is in his hand and she's looking at him, her expression pure disgust. Underneath that, though, there's real fear.

This is who you were, the voice says again, a little louder now. *So much anger, and so little control. So ready to lash out. So brave in front of people who were weaker than you.* The voice laughs, a little contemptuously. Every time it speaks, Billy gets more flashes of memory. An abandoned warehouse, covered in rats. Hiding from the sunlight he normally would have sought out. He shakes his head to clear it and drops Max's wrist. She recoils against the passenger side door, as far from him as she can get.

"I hate you," she hisses, and he sees the tears in her eyes that she refuses to shed. She pushes her way out of the car and slams the door a little too hard behind her. He buries his face in his hands.

She hates you. She fears you. Doesn't it make you feel powerful? You can give in to it, the voice purrs at him. *You don't have to fight with yourself this way.*

"Fuck off," Billy mutters, and gets out of the car. He sets off in a random direction. As he walks, he tries to replace that memory with other memories. Max doesn't sit like that in his car anymore—she doesn't. He pictures her like she was just a few days ago, relaxed, leaning back against the passenger seat while she tried to suppress a laugh. She had turned to scowl at him, but there wasn't any real fury

in it.

"You're such a fuckface," she had said, with something suspiciously close to a smile.

"It's better now," he mutters to himself, less certain than he'd like. The voice seems to take that as an invitation.

For how long? it asks calmly. *How long before you lash out again and it all crumbles? How long until she fears you again?* Billy asks himself the same question all the time, so he doesn't have a good answer for that. He walks faster. When the world fades out and he steps into a new one, he wishes he hadn't hurried.

He's back in the house in California, the only place he's ever thought of as home. He's ten and he's watching his mother pack.

"It's not forever, baby, I promise." She pauses in what she's doing to reach out and touch his face. "I just need a little time to figure things out," she says, mostly to herself. Billy knows what happens next. He knows that he cries, and that he begs, and that she leaves anyway, and that she doesn't come back. He also knows that he would have begged much harder if he had had any idea what his life was going to be like without her. He stares at her for a long moment, a little disgusted with himself that he still, even now, misses her.

She knew, the voice whispers. *She knew what you were, even back then. She ran from you.*

"She didn't," Billy whispers reflexively, but it cuts deeply; Billy remembers now that the voice lived in his head for only a few days, but that was plenty of time for it to dig through his memories and find the most painful moments. His deepest fears. He worries, for the first time, about what's coming next. About how much worse it's going to get. Still, he can't be here anymore. He turns and stumbles blindly down the stairs and out the front door. He walks toward the ocean, hoping it might bring at least a fraction of the solace it used to. Instead, the voice follows him. *The people who were supposed to love you the most couldn't do it. Why do you think that is, Billy?*

The words themselves are bad enough, but they come with new

memories. Memories of his hands, holding people down, subduing them so they could be taken. Memories of himself attacking Max's friends. Attacking Max, bringing that fear back into her eyes. Bringing the monster a sacrifice.

You helped me, the voice says. Have you asked yourself why I chose you? It's because I truly saw you when no one else did. I knew what you were.

"Stop," Billy whispers, picking up his pace. It's a mistake, probably, but he can't be here anymore. It raises too many painful questions. He walks straight toward the water, half-hoping it will end here. It doesn't.

The grey fog appears between one step and the next, and then he's straddling Steve and he can taste blood and he's not stopping.

"No," he whispers to himself, recoiling. He scrambles backwards. He hears the nerds screaming behind him, but he can't take his eyes off of Steve, moaning softly on the floor. He's only half-conscious and his face looks worse than Billy remembers.

This is who you were. They all feared you. Isn't that better than being afraid all the time? Billy feels himself trembling at the rush of memories, at the way El had touched his face at the end, at what it felt like to die. He doesn't know what it means, but he knows he has to get out of here. He scrambles to his feet and runs out the front door, though he knows it's futile. After all, he can never outrun himself. The fog is barely a flicker this time, and then he stops abruptly. For a second, he forgets how to breathe. He's standing in the parking lot at the pool. It's long enough after closing that the summer sun is starting to set. Steve is leaning against the Camaro, smiling at him. Billy feels himself walk across the parking lot, shoulders tight, eyes burning. He tries to stop, tries to turn around, but it's like his body has escaped his control again.

This is who you were, the voice whispers. You destroy everything you touch, even this. Especially this. It was always just a matter of time. You were always going to end up here. You can never truly escape. Billy knows that the voice is right. That he took his anger and his frustration and his self-hatred and his fear, and he aimed them at

Steve. The one person who deserved it the least. He closes his eyes and drops to his knees. He won't watch this; living through it once was bad enough. He knows what he said, knows that he aimed too close to Steve's heart, knows that he shoved Steve back a few steps after promising himself that he would never put his hands on him like that again. He knows that he crossed too many lines to ever come back from it. And then he made it worse. He flirted with Karen Wheeler, and then he made an actual plan to meet up with her. And then he crashed his car, and the voice arrived, and he died.

He curls into himself, hands coming up to clutch at his head. He doesn't care if El thought he could do this; he can't. He's willing to give in, if this will stop. He starts to say that, but his hand closes around something unexpected. He opens his hand to look at it. It's a crushed daisy, from the flower crown El gave him in the meadow. He stares at it, and suddenly he's somewhere else.

Billy is on a blanket under a tree in a clearing. He's stretched out on his back and Steve is sitting cross-legged next to him, his knee touching Billy's hip. It's a warm spring day, and Billy feels a little drowsy. He's watching Steve, his hands busy with the small pile of flowers in his lap. Billy remembers this day vividly. He had been thinking, in that moment, of what it took to get here. The weeks of resolutely staying away from Steve, partly because of Max and partly because it hurt too much to see how Steve's shoulders tensed up every time Billy got close to him. The way he took an extra set of notes in all of the classes they had together and slipped them into Steve's locker every afternoon. His awkward, halting apology, delivered only after Steve had stopped tensing up at the mere sight of him. Weeks of brief, tentative conversations over shared cigarettes in the parking lot or outside the arcade. Late nights at the quarry, laughing and feeling less alone than he had in years. A first kiss on the hood of the Camaro, under the stars.

"What are you doing?" he asks a little sleepily. Steve smiles over at him.

"Daisy chain." He holds it up to show Billy, who smiles back. "Haven't you ever made one?"

"Not for years," Billy replies. He remembers his mother's nimble

hands, showing him how. The memory throws a chill over his happiness. He stares at Steve's long fingers, expertly twining flowers together.

"You should hate me," he says abruptly, fully awake now. Steve glances over at him, seemingly unfazed by the turn the conversation has taken.

"Maybe," he says calmly. After a pause, he adds, "There are certainly people out there who should probably hate me."

"I hurt you," Billy says. Steve sets down his daisy chain and turns his full attention to Billy.

"You did," Steve agrees. "But you gave me space afterwards. And then you apologized. And more importantly, you demonstrated that you meant it."

"I could hurt you again," Billy says. Steve nods.

"You could," he agrees. Billy doesn't know what to say to that. Steve watches him for a long time, and then picks up the flowers. He reaches over and twines the daisy chain twice around Billy's wrist. He ties it off so it will stay. "I think," Steve says finally, his voice soft, "that it takes time to change." His hand is still warm around Billy's wrist, but he's staring down at his lap. "I've spent a lot of time thinking that there's something wrong with me that makes people leave." Billy starts to say something, but Steve shakes his head and continues. "And I'm trying to be better, but I'm going to fuck up. I'm going to react to things based on that fear." He looks back over at Billy. "You're probably also going to fuck up," he says matter-of-factly. Billy just blinks at him, so Steve continues. "It doesn't have to be evidence that you're a terrible person. It can just mean that you fucked up. I think what matters more is what you choose to do after that." Billy stares at him for a moment, surprised, though he probably shouldn't be. Steve has always been insightful about people.

"Where did that come from, Harrington?" he asks, trying to break the tension, his voice a little rough with emotion. Steve shrugs and looks back down, but he has a little smile on his face.

"I hang out with a lot of really smart people," he says. Billy sits up so he can take Steve's face in his hands and press a kiss to the corner of his lips.

"Pretty sure that was all you, baby." Billy knows what happens next in this memory—he kisses Steve until they're both gasping with it, and then he spreads him out on the blanket under the tree and—

—but he doesn't have time for that right now. He would love nothing more than to stay here with memory Steve, but he has a lot of things he needs to say to actual Steve, which means he has to wake up. He quickly kisses Steve on the cheek and then stands up.

"I love you so fucking much," he says, just to practice saying it out loud, because he hasn't yet. "I really hope you still want to hear that when I get back." Steve just smiles at him. Billy walks to the middle of the clearing and looks around. He knows the voice is here somewhere.

"You're right," he says. "All of that is who I was. And it's who I still could be. But it's not who I *am*." He wonders, then, if El's wording had been intentional. *Don't forget who you are*. Probably. She's a smart fucking kid. He continues. "It's not who I *have* to be. I get to choose. And I choose to be better."

They won't take you back, the voice says. *And if they do, you'll just destroy it again. They'll never really trust you.*

"Maybe not," Billy shrugs, "but maybe they will. So I'm choosing to try. Now where the fuck are the exits in this place?"

Billy sits up with a gasp. He looks around a little frantically. It smells like decay and the concrete floor of the warehouse is cold and rough underneath him. He rolls onto his hands and knees and vomits until there's nothing left. He spits a few times and then just focuses on breathing. There are particles floating in the air, and everything is eerily still. Billy is still working on breathing when the wall next to him *opens up* and familiar hands drag him to his feet. He gets hauled *through the wall* and then he's standing on the same concrete floor,

but the air is much clearer and the wall is closing up behind him. There are lights and there's noise and he ignores all of it to step closer to Steve and bury his face in his neck. He half expects Steve to recoil, but Steve's arms come around him and pull him close. Steve just holds him for a long moment.

"I'm still so fucking pissed at you," Steve eventually whispers into his ear, and Billy tries to laugh, but it devolves into a coughing fit. Steve clings to him even more tightly. "You can't pick a fight and run, and then get possessed and *die* before we even have a chance to talk about it, you absolute fucking asshole." Billy feels a rush of pure relief. Because he clearly isn't dead, and because Steve is angry but he's *here*, and he's holding onto Billy like he still cares. Like he hasn't given up on him, even though maybe he should have.

"I'm sorry, I'm so goddamn sorry," Billy whispers into Steve's neck. "I love you so fucking much," he adds because he needs to say it. Steve goes still, and Billy holds his breath.

"You're such a dick," Steve whispers, but the hand that he brings up to the back of Billy's head is exquisitely gentle, and his voice is shaking with emotion.

"I *know*," Billy says, and then they're both crying, and there are people all around them, and Billy feels two bodies collide with him from behind.

"I knew you could do it," El says solemnly at the same time that Max says, "I knew you were too fucking stubborn to die."

"Language," Steve says automatically, and Max snorts, and then Billy is laughing and crying at the same time. He's exhausted and he's filthy and he only has the vaguest idea of what just happened and Steve is probably going to be pissed at him for a while, but he's so, so happy. Because his shitty choices will always be a part of his story, but maybe they don't have to define him.

Maybe he gets to start again.

Notes for the Chapter:

Me: I can wrap this up pretty quickly.
This chapter: YOU THOUGHT, LOL

Anyway, this got out of hand, but I'm a little obsessed with it. I hope you liked it too!

Author's Note:

To be continued! Tomorrow, specifically.

Day 6-7: stargazing, daisy chain

This one was a bit of a departure for me, but super fun to write. I hope you like it!